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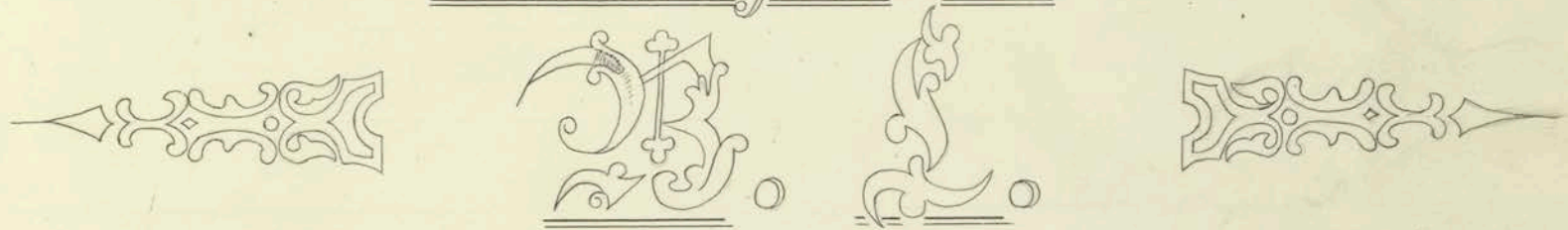
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Snithersfield

THESIS

DEVELOPMENT of CHRISTIANITY.

For Degree of



School of Literature and Science.

Melen E. Butterfield.

~ 1891 ~

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L7

Development of Christianity

In looking back over the evolution of the human race, we see a remarkable unity in the development and decline of different nations and peoples. In nature, plants and animals have their time of birth, their period of growth, their decline and death. This natural law seems to find a parallel in the history of nations. In the principalities of antiquity, each rises to prominence and influence, makes its contribution to civilization, and, after a period either, disappears in some younger, fresher element, settles into a stagnated condition, lacking both the energy and the power for further growth. But like the rising tide of the sea, each swell of thought on the ocean of years rises a little higher than its

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predecessor toward the shining shore of truth.

The mind of man is the great psychological force which has moved and adjusted the varied activities of nature about him, and transformed them into practical manifestations. But there is another realm of activity for the human mind which does not manifest itself through the material world—the religious side of human character. The religious evolution of the race is a marvelous study. We can trace ideas, growing and shaping themselves from vague imaginings and the wonder stage into the broader and more realistic conceptions of modern times. But it is not the province of this paper to trace the evolution of the religious nature of man, only in so far as it has affected the growth of Christianity.

There is a many-sided principle which explains

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The past must needs have been what it was for the purposes of growth. And as we expect future ages to look with tolerance upon the contradictions of our age, we must look with a like spirit of moderation upon the past. Christ appeared in history before the people were ready for the principles he enunciated; but we to-day are yet far, far behind the Christ ideal.

Judaism and Christianity.

Christianity appeared under the shadow of Judaical thought. For many years some of the forms of Judaism clung to it. But they were gradually thrown off. In 49 A.D. the rite of circumcision was repudiated after much discussion. But the disciples were Jews and in their hands the faith could not but assume some Jewish forms. Disputes and discussions arising among the

apostles, usually ended in a further departure from the parent faith.

Judaism was itself, essentially different in spirit and kind from the teaching of Jesus. It had lived its life and had come to its period of decline. It had degenerated into empty formalism in which there was no life principle. Jesus came and brought the vitalizing power of a new spiritual life. Says James Freeman Clarke "The originality of Jesus was not in saying what had never been thought before, but in vitalizing old truth out of a central spiritual life."

But the pure stream of Christianity had hardly started upon its course before the polluting sediments of man's theological speculations appear in its crystal waters.

Transition from Simple Gospel to Theological System.

The problem presented is this. Christ lived, taught his simple truths, and precepts of right living, was crucified by the people he tried to elevate. A little band of men who believed in him, started out to spread his doctrines among the nations. This was the beginning. Passing quickly over two or three centuries and what a marvelous change is apparent. Do we recognize the realization of the high ideals of the humble Nazarene in this chaotic church of the fourth century?

Religion is divine, but Theology is sadly human. Man has mixed the pure metal with the alloy of human weakness. In the selfishness of the human heart and in the progress of events we read the cooperating internal and external causes which produced this transformation. We do not need to go beyond the teachings of the apostles themselves and the founding

of the apostolic churches, to see the beginnings of this transformation.

Church under the Roman Empire. There are two directions in which the church underwent radical changes under the Roman Empire: first in the religion itself which we will speak of as the "paganization of Christianity"; second as to the political status and position of the church and the matter of church government. We come to to speak of the first of these changes.

Christianity in the first centuries. Its converts worked suffered and died for its principles. They were sent to save the nations, feeling the greatness of the mission, they spared no means or hardship to accomplish the result. This power has been in every proselyting religion, - of firing the soul to an enthusiasm which carries the indiv-

idual through bloody scenes, and causes him to do deeds which in his calmer moments he would deem impossible.

Under Diocletian, in the third century, the Christians were terribly persecuted. They retired, many of them, to the catacombs under the city to escape torture. They were never discouraged, however, in the darkest hour, their religion was an ever present comfort. It offered a promise of sure reward for faithfulness. After the abdication of Diocletian, 305, Constantine, the Shrewd statesman succeeded to the imperial dignity. He soon discovered that the strongest element in the state was Christian and he allied himself with it as a political measure. Christianity now became the state religion, and with the exception of the infrequent attempt at reversion by the Neoplatonist

Julian (361-363) it steadily continued so. The union which Constantine made of Christianity, is a distinguishing event, which marks the transition of the simple Gospel from its primitive purity into the political machine of ensuing centuries.

Constantine desired to conciliate all parties all parties in the state. He desired to attract and hold the pagans as well as the Christians. Hence arose heathen rites under Christian formulae. The pagan statues were somewhat altered in feature and called after Christian saints. The Christians themselves thought these means justifiable in order to convert the heathen. A few among them, however, were shocked at the turn of affairs. Says one of the Fathers of the Church writing to a Bishop: "You have substituted your agape for the sacrifices of the pagans, for their idols

your martyrs, whom you serve with the same honor.
We see under the phraseology of Christianity a revival of the worship of Isis, Osiris, Zeus and Apollo. Minerva was believed to brandish a spear. The statues in our cathedrals performed miracles. They handed out money and bread to the needy. The paintings were seen to blush, and roll their eyes. The goddess, holding the infant Horus in her arms was reproduced in the Madonnas.

This paganization of the faith reached its culmination in the miracle worship of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The work of science since then has been to root out the engrafted superstitions.

We now turn to the political status and internal government of the church.

At first the churches were simple congregations

of believers drawn together by similarity of interpretation of the scriptures. But as there were additions to this body of men, they would be subject to the same vicissitudes as any other organization in its development. Offices sprang up in the church. Men rose to prominence and power. At first there had been no distinction between clergy and laity, but in time a sharp line of separation is apparent. The clergy were regarded as the representatives of God upon earth; hence they came to act as a mediatory influence between God and man. This added sanctity to their office.

The peculiar position of the church among the nations led it into special temptations. To come within the pale and protection of an organization especially guarded by an all powerful creator, was to find a haven of rest in a

troubles and chaotic world. Constantine fostered this idea and did everything the position of ecclesiastics attractive. He preferred submissive priests to mutinous soldiers.

The position of the church also inculcated the doctrine of infallibility. This idea carries the reputation in the statement Absolute truth has never been given to mortal man. The confining of the activity of the human mind by the iron chains of power is a fruitful source of dissension and persecution, and always militates against progress.

At first the Church existed in different portions of the world with no official unity. There was a general belief in a spiritual unity but it was not a working force in the church. The example of the Roman Empire was strong. Its governmental scheme was the mould in which all

organizations in that early time were cast. The Empire represented the idea of one supreme authority in all temporal matters. Now our growing, infallible Christian Society, breathing the atmosphere of this idea, felt an ambition stirring it for supreme power in spiritual affairs. Ambitious men saw in the Church an opportunity to gratify that ambition.

Meanwhile the office has arisen and taken a prominent place in the Church. The city bishops were extending their influence. Ambition among the largest cities mounted higher. There must be one city, one bishop, standing at the head and controlling the whole spiritual realm. There were three cities in the race for power, Rome, Constantinople, and Alexandria. The removal of the capital to the Bosphorus by Constantine was a strong point in favor of the Roman bishop, who received the man-

til of traditional power, which hung about the ancient city, and shared it with none. Rome had many circumstances in its favor which finally secured the prize. This history is more of church and ecclesiastical interest. But the imperial form the church assumed, at this time, influenced Christian thought, and increased its dogmatic tendencies. The rulings of the popes and councils fixed hard and fast limits to the activity of the human mind.

Church and the Barbarians The old order of civilization had, in the fifth century reached its lowest degree. the time for its extinction was at hand. In the fullness of time the necessary agent appeared. The cloud had long been gathering at the north, and the murmurings of the approaching storm were distinctly heard. But the full force of the storm burst in the fifth century. The barbarians overran the whole

face of the civilized world and so dark a cloud of ignorance and superstition settled over Europe, that the light of better things seemed entirely shut out. The Church was the only organized conservative force in the world and to her was given the responsible duty of preserving to future generations the sacred light of civilization. How she fulfilled this important mission, in how far she failed in how far she succeeded, will next claim our attention. As the precepts of Christianity were before changed to suit the pagans it was trying to convert; so again a similar problem is presented - how to give a religion adapted to a people of old established civilization to a race yet in its childhood. The truths of Christianity were nothing to the Goths and Vandals. Again the Christians take the conciliatory course. Ceremonies, pageants, and gala processions were invented

to allure the ignorant and superstitious. "The belief of the thoughtful must ever be alloyed with the superstition of the populace."

Many of the races accepted this religion for its novelty, others for the power it would bring them. The conversion of Clovis and his Franks forms a familiar and characteristic story. The issue turned on the result of a certain battle. If the Christian God should give the victory to Clovis, he and all his Franks would serve him. After the successful day, Clovis and all his men were baptized and were thenceforth Christians. Does any one suppose that the heart of a single barbarian was one whit changed by the baptismal rite?

With this chaotic condition of affairs there came to the church a dangerous and tempting power. For the next few centuries ecclesiastical history is the story

of intrigues, plots and persecutions. A general corruption pervaded the whole system. But the ideals of Christ's teachings were never entirely lost to the world. We see men arising, amid the viciousness of the system, who earnestly strove for the restoration of true principle and justice in the world. But human nature will vitiate the most perfect system ever raised ^{up} for its elevation and this is the primary cause of the aspect the Church assumes during these times.

The two prominent features of Church history during Medaeval times are the growth of the Papacy, and the rise of Monasticism. We touch these points briefly and only as they touch the thought side of Church growth. The history is familiar. These two elements most affected the Church in its relations to civil government and only in an indirect way influenced modern religious thought. However the paradoxical positions of the

Popes often brought before the people a subject for thought, and prepared the way for the Reformation of the sixteenth century.

According to Guizot, the papacy began to assert its power under Gregory VII (1073-1085), reached its height of power under Innocent III (1198-1217), and declined to the low estate it reached under Boniface VIII (1295-1303). The papacy served its purpose in the world, in the authority it exercised when there was no other coercive force in the State. But it also fettered the soul with manacles of ecclesiastical bondage, more baleful than any physical slavery the world has ever seen. The system outlived its usefulness and has beaten out its strength on the rocks of temporal institutions.

The Monks were of great service to the church in planning, scheming and working in her interest

They were indefatigable. Of course, the ascetic system, right enough in its original idea, gave rise to absurd and often cruel customs. The monks preserved much classical learning to the modern world. For their tireless labors in that line we owe them a debt of gratitude.

Christianity and the Human Mind.

We have thus far traced the growth of the Church, or in other words we have seen how men, seized the fragment of truth from the teachings of the Master and made this a center about which they built up a vast system, half religious, half political. We traced this organization through its period of growth, after which it enters upon its period of decline. The attitude of the Church as final arbiter in all things intellectual and spiritual was an advantageous position while the race was in its infancy. But as the barbarian conquerors began in their

in their turn to be conquered by the superior intellectual and civilizing forces of the peoples they dominated, the human mind began to revolt against this coercion of its liberties. Before speaking of the Reformation, it is necessary to go back over the ground already past and take a little view of the internal thought side of Christianity.

It was under the Nicene that the Church, not only claimed for herself the authority to decide what was right - but declared that there was to be found within its pale all the truth that is needful for the redemption of the race. From this claim as a cause, arose the Holy Inquisition. Ah! what dark and bloody scenes rise in the mind at that word. The principle at the basis of the idea was wrong; hence vicious manifestations would necessarily arise. The trouble lay fundamentally

in claiming that absolute truth is within the grasp of mortal man. No system can claim for itself infallibility without stamping the lie on the face of it. We are shielded by a wise Providence from an Omniscience which would overpower the Soul.

The difference between philosophy and religion lies in the power in the former for growth, change, and advance; while in the absolutism of the latter there is a stagnating influence. Even amidst the enlightenment of these late days we find science and philosophy leaving religion far in the rear.

The Fathers of the Church, took each of them some few precepts of the Great Teacher and formulating their conclusions and speculations, they called men to witness the perfect religion. We to day are accepting the results of thought born in the fourth century. We are allowing others to do

our thinking for us. He should throw off this inert habit of mind, and with confidence in our own individuality develop a little independent thought.

To St. Augustine we are indebted for a complete exposition of the doctrine of original sin. His view was opposed by Pelagius, who held that Adam was mortal and that the eating of the apple was not the cause of his death. Pelagius was twice tried and acquitted of heresy but finally, through the influence of Count Valerius, was convicted and St. Augustine's doctrine established by law. Thus the orthodoxy of all Europe was settled by an obscure court intrigue.

No word occurs in the Bible about the trinity. Long extended discussions were held upon this point among the early Christians. Tertullian at the end of the second century gives us a complete elucidation of this idea which forms one of the central dogmas of orthodoxy.

The system of Tertullian differs vastly in purity and real spirituality from the later beliefs under Constantine. The doctrine of the trinity was not officially ratified until the fourth century.

The idea of the divine inspiration of the scriptures was one long in dispute. In fact the authenticity of the New Testament was not established until the third century. It was not until 405 Innocent I fixed the inspiration by decree.

Indeed, these early Christian centuries are filled with accounts of theories springing up on every side, some immediately being crushed as heresies, others finding acceptance in the orthodox creeds. Which fate should be accorded to a given dogma was decided often by the merest chance. Discussions as to the size of the universe occupy a prominent place; also as to whether the heavens were crystal.

line; of what substance are the stars? the relative positions of Heaven and Hell, the real nature of Christ: two natures or one: the position of the Holy Ghost in the trinity; the place of the Virgin. So examples might be multiplied almost indefinitely.

The Nicene council, which forms the basis of modern orthodoxy, declared firmly against the Arian heresy, which may be called Medieval Unitarianism. There were forty five different councils about this time, all of them pronouncing different verdicts upon this question.

The whole aspect of the church councils of the middle ages is blocking. No case was decided upon its merits, but upon the power of the shrewd scheming of those engineering it, to carry it through. There was a carelessness of human life and liberty which shocks our modern notions of the

dignity of man. Said Pope Pius II., concerning the ecclesiastical councils of his time: "They are ruled, not so much by the Holy Ghost as by the passions of men." The spirit of mediæval theology was against growth and expansion of thought. We can see very plainly how the "Conflict of Religion and Science" arose. But it was more of a conflict of science and theology. Religion should embody in itself the scientific spirit. "As early as the second century began the contest between faith and reason, religion and philosophy, piety and genius." The names of the martyrs to science, sacrificed by the church, are familiar. Hypatia, sacrificed for her philosophy in the fourth century; Arabic and Hellenic learning forcibly crushed; Abelard persecuted for believing that the reason should be satisfied in matters of Faith; Copernicus keeping his wonderful

discoveries secret for many years, for fear of his life; Bruno dying in the sixteenth century for a belief in the plurality of worlds. Galileo's fate is familiar. The church feared for its power in these ambitious attempts of the human mind, for, "Ignorance is the mother of devotion". Miracles, not eternal law was the watchword of the church.

But gradually the reform came as it needs must have come. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, signs of the approaching revolution were apparent to the thoughtful observer. Heresies were abundant. The Albigensians in France, the Hussites in Bohemia found large followings. The crusades had caused a stirring of thought among the nations. Many causes combined to make this epoch the one peculiarly adapted to perform this great work. The geographical discoveries, the awakening of the commercial spirit, inventions, all these

things combined to make the people throw aside the senseless superstitions that were confining their activity.

The crisis came in the sixteenth century. Luther, Melancthon, Calvin and Zwingli all were exponents of the reform. But each presented to the world a formulated system of his own. They had no conception of the extent and scope of the reforms they advocated. They had no tolerance for thought that was ambitious beyond the limits they prescribed.

Protestantism, the result of a most earnest plea of reason for freedom, received the mantle of dogmatism from medieval Catholicism. Eighteen Christian centuries, the force of scientific thought, our boasted progress in civilization, even the high ideals of the Master have not been strong enough to shake off this baleful heritage. Our churches today bow down to Calvinism. Calvin, who based his system on patristic philosophy. He are fighting for theories which sprung up in the world when the race needed them for

its particular stage of development. But we have grown and advanced with the ages. We need something broader, truer, higher that we may live the truest lives.

Some of the wisest of our generation consider that Christianity is threatened as never before by the destroying influence of scientific thought. It is evident that the theology of long ago is strongly assailed, - its defense now is merely ostensible and we can but believe that in a few years it will cease to defend its untenable theories.

But the ideals and high standards of Christianity. Have a life of their own and a spirit of truth which live through years and centuries of advancing science. The rites and forms of Christianity may pass into the dim records of the past but the spirit of love, truth and sacrifice which Christ's life represents will ever stir the human heart to pity and rouse the soul to a desire for a higher life. Change, Mutation, development decline, extinction

are the laws that work about us. Geology tells us of the vast changes in the apparently firm ground under our feet. Man as other species of animals may not have an eternal habitation on this globe. The ice fields of the Arctic regions are slowly encroaching upon our temperate zones. A few centuries and we may leave but leave faint records upon the great rock pages of time and all our vaunted civilization may be buried as others have been before us. Why then are we afraid? Timidity of mind restrains our mental activities. Let us deal fearlessly with the principles and problems of science. While life remains let us battle courageously for the advance of thought and the union of creeds and truth.

